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SUBJECT: Khrushchev's Power and the November, 1962, Plenum

REF :

RETAIN OR DESTROY

FILE

SUMMARY

This airgram is devoted to a consideration of the effects on KHRUSHCHEV's power of the November 19-23, 1962, Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In approaching the topical aspects of this question, it examines generally the nature and extent of Khrushchev's power.

While some members of the Soviet leadership have taken positions which are more conservative than Khrushchev's (KOZLOV, for example, has done so fairly consistently), there is nothing in the present composition of the leadership that leads us to conclude that Khrushchev is confronted by a firm group of opponents on all issues. Nor can we find convincing evidence that any group or individual within the present leadership would radically alter Soviet policy if Khrushchev were suddenly to depart the scene.

With regard to the results of the November Plenum, Khrushchev's position within the Secretariat seems strengthened, and the position of the Secretariat itself has apparently been enhanced by the increase in its membership plus the vesting of high-level functional responsibilities in the four new Secretaries.

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SMYTHE-BUNDY
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KOMER
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The Nature of Khrushchev's Power.

It is a commonplace to say that although Khrushchev rules the Party, he does not rule supreme as STALIN did. He has neither the charisma nor

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The Ambassador (in draft)

the coercive power that Stalin had at his personal disposal after he had wiped out the Stalinists who helped him to power. What, then, is the present extent of Khrushchev's power in the leadership? Does he want to follow Stalin's path and create a one-man Party? Is there something inherent in the "imperatives of totalitarianism" that will force him, willy-nilly, to take this path (as some academic students of the Soviet scene seem to think)? It is necessary to try to answer these questions concretely, despite the fact that the answers must admittedly be based on inadequate information.

Khrushchev runs the Party and through it rules the state by means of the institutional arrangements bequeathed him by Stalin. The shattering of the police power (ultimately the pillar of Stalin's personal tyranny over the Party after 1930) should not obscure the fact that the traditional levers of Party control, fashioned by Stalin, are still very much in operation; and Khrushchev has his hands on those levers. These are the apparat--the Secretariat of the Central Committee, the power of which has just been enhanced by the decision of the November Plenum to enlarge it--the CC Presidium, the CC Bureau for the RSFSR, and the Central Committee itself. As early as June, 1957, Khrushchev's victory over the "anti-Party group" showed that he had successfully built a stable machine in the Central Committee. Following the defeat of MALENKOV, MOLOTOV, & Co., he moved to form a majority for himself within the Presidium. This majority* enabled him to realize the reforms of 1958-59, during the period of his greatest ascendancy, and apparently continues, with ups and downs, to support him on most issues. It is not, however, an automatic majority on every issue, nor can we assume that the members of the Presidium do not need a considerable amount of convincing before proposals made by the First Secretary are adopted. It is in this process of convincing that the Presidium both exerts a moderating influence on Khrushchev's ebullience and tendency to go to extremes, and compels changes in proposals laid before it.

From the point of view of institutional strength, Khrushchev stands today about where Stalin stood in 1934, at the time of the "Congress of Victors." But neither the institutions, nor the historical circumstances, are today what they were then.

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* It is worth adding a note here on SUSLOV. We find it difficult to understand how Suslov can be considered either an actual or potential rival, or a consistent opponent, of Khrushchev, when we know that, at the culmination of the struggle with the "anti-Party group", the most serious crisis of Khrushchev's career, the only two who stood by him in the Presidium were MIKOYAN and Suslov. Moreover, Suslov chaired the Central Committee Plenum of June, 1957, which disposed of the anti-Khrushchev faction. Of course, people change; but Suslov was on the side of agriculture in the discussions last spring on the resource allocation problem. (Embassy's D-969, May 1, 1962). The notion that Suslov heads a "Stalinist" opposition to Khrushchev within the leadership seems to us a journalistic embellishment. He did, however, in a speech in early 1962, take a divergent stand on certain aspects of peaceful coexistence and bloc problems which was closer to the Chinese position. He has taken an enigmatic position on the legacy of the "anti-Party group" and the extent to which they have been discredited and has not been as sweeping as some other Soviet leaders in denunciation of the contributions of Stalin.

What about the "imperatives of totalitarianism"? The same orchestra is capable of bringing forth the most varied harmonies, depending on who wields the baton. In addition to the large personal factor involved here (and it would be hard, in the Soviet context, to define a style of rule that differs more from Stalin's own than does Khrushchev's), the times and the circumstances both seem to be operating in such a way as to render these "imperatives" less imperative.

More important, Khrushchev (insofar as we can know these things) does not really appear to aspire to the mantle of "Vozhd". He recognizes perhaps better than anyone else the tendency within enfeebled the Party and the presence of Stalin's style of rule and is [illegible] deeply disturbed [illegible] from the anti-Stalin campaign itself--that may be to make a Stalinist restoration impossible. To the specific condemnation of Stalin's thesis on the sharpening of the class conflict during the building of socialism, he has added the coup de grâce of the final and complete victory of socialism in the USSR, with its clear implication that the Sturm-und-Drang period, both within the Party and among the populace at large, is over. He has also cast off the doctrine of capitalist encirclement, traditionally used to justify the heightening of domestic tensions and the application of repressive measures. It would be wrong to infer that he is some sort of liberal-minded reformer (as Stalin implied when he called him a Narodnik), but his actions vis-a-vis the Party have pretty clearly aimed at creating a less irrational dictatorship--what he himself calls the "restoration of the Leninist norms of intra-Party life"--one in which consensus would replace, to a marked extent, the cabals of Stalin's rule.

What is valid in the "imperatives of totalitarianism" view, and what some of those who subscribe to it may really be trying to say, is that any political system demands the creation of a symbol, or set of symbols, in behalf of which the people's allegiance can be invoked, and totalitarian systems (at least, those with which we are so far familiar) demand the personification of symbols to a degree which far exceeds that common in democracies. "The Party" is all very well for Party members, but not calculated to appeal to non-members. "Lenin" serves for many, both Party and non-Party alike, but, despite the elaborate cult which has been created around him, is clearly not felt by the leadership to be enough. "Khrushchev", and the cult created around him (it is substantial), is thus necessary. (This is a trait, really, of national political immaturity, and a non-totalitarian, but underdeveloped, country like India stands as much in need of this crutch as the Nazis or Communists.)

This, combined with the continuing and ever-urgent preoccupation of the leadership with the problem of legitimacy, still not really solved even after 45 years, makes it highly desirable that the prime inner name whose name becomes the symbol be maintained as long as that is at all possible. The leadership has a lot invested in "Khrushchev", however it may regard the man himself at any given point in time, and the problems connected with his passing from the scene are such as to give effective pause to those of his peers who might be tempted to hasten it. This situation, in turn, gives him a leverage he can make good use of under extreme circumstances. (Stalin told the Politburo, "You are blind like young kittens...After I die, the imperialists will crush you," and the colleagues are no doubt still wondering at their luck in having escaped this fate.)

In spite of the absence of clear primacy within the leadership, however, there are signs which suggest that he no longer has the free-wheeling sway he held from the time of the removal of the "Anti-Party group" up to, roughly, the May, 1960, Plenum. As far as domestic policies and politics are concerned (and it is in this area that most high-level differences are apparently concentrated), this period was distinguished by identification of almost all the major domestic changes with Khrushchev himself: the 1957 economic reorganization, the MTS reform and the first heavy investment in virgin lands of 1954, the promulgation of the Seven-Year-Plan Control Figures at the XXI Party Congress in 1959. The operation of several of these measures was preceded by nation-wide "discussions" of Khrushchev's "theses" on the matter at hand.

The last few years, on the other hand, show a somewhat different style of leadership on Khrushchev's part, even though his institutional strength has remained approximately the same. Great deference continues to be paid to the First Secretary, but governmental actions said to stem from his personal initiative have become rare. Whereas he still interrupts and badgers other speakers at meetings in bloc countries (in Bulgaria and Rumania, during his trips there this past spring), he was a model of parliamentary decorum during the March and November, 1962, Plenums, a striking contrast to his behavior at past Plenums (e.g. December, 1958, and January, 1961) which dealt with similar problems. In short, he no longer seems able (some would say "willing", but we should not agree) to impose his personal views and ram home his pet projects in the face of high-level opposition or recalcitrance. (This should not surprise us really, for Stalin could not do so either before the Great Purge. It is interesting to recall in this connection Stalin's telegram of September, 1936, to the Politburo in which he said, in effect, that the Purge was four years late in getting started. If Stalin could be thwarted on so important an issue in 1932, then, allowing for all the differences between the situation in the early 1930's and that today, there does not appear to be any compelling reason to ascribe policy-making omnipotence to Khrushchev.)

Differences of opinion within the Presidium on two major domestic problems bear out this contention, and point toward a thwarting of Khrushchev's will. These are the prolonged argument over the proper proportions for Soviet resources allocation and the question of further action against members of the "Anti-Party group."

On the first point, Kozlov, BREZHNEV, KOSYGIN, PONOMAREV, and SHELEPIN appear to have espoused the view that the Party must continue its traditional priority emphasis on producers' goods, while another group of Presidium and Secretariat members, led by Khrushchev, has argued for increasing investments in agriculture and light industry. For the moment, an unstable compromise appears to have been reached. Significantly moderating the position he took in the winter and spring of 1961, Khrushchev at the November, 1961, Plenum explicitly acknowledged the priority status of heavy industry. At the same time, he coupled this acknowledgment with another swipe at "comrades who wear metal blinders" and reaffirmed his personal interest in increasing investments in the chemical industry (which has a claim to be regarded as both "heavy" and "light").

The problem with the "Anti-Party group" is, of course, whether to expel them from the Party, which, it seems to us, is clearly Khrushchev's personal desire. For a variety of reasons, enough of the leadership has boggled at the notion to

prevent it from [illegible] the [illegible] of Khrushchev's personal power and prestige [illegible] December, 1962, Plenum. During the period preceding the November, 1962, Plenum, there were signs that Khrushchev was preparing to renew the demand. Perhaps in the interest of pre-Congress solidarity, the issue was not raised at the November Plenum. But the mobilization question is always a lurking one, and we would expect it to continue to be a live issue, behind the scenes, for the foreseeable future. On this point at the XXIII Congress, Voronov, KOSYGIN, MIKOYAN, Suslov, GRISHIN, RASHIDOV, POVAR [illegible], and DOLGIKH, were among those who failed to support the demand for mobilization-wor[illegible] a varied assortment of leaders which probably reflects the [illegible] thinking in the upper levels of the Party on the issue.

When we turn to possible differences within the Party leadership on foreign-policy questions, the hard facts on which to form judgments are so meager that we are, in the main, reduced to fruitless speculation.

Although it is reasonable to postulate the existence among the members of the top Party leadership of varying approaches to foreign-policy matters, the application of the terms "dogmatist" and "opposition" seems rather Procrustean. The former overstates the presumptive consistency and congruence of the views that may be supposed to be held by those who do not completely, or always, agree with the manner and content of Khrushchev's approach to foreign policy; the latter exaggerates the extent to which one may suppose, on the basis of what we can observe, the existence of a group which holds a more or less unified view and is characterized by stability of membership.

While some members of the Soviet leadership have taken positions which are more conservative than Khrushchev's (Mikoyan, for example, has done so fairly consistently), there is nothing in the present composition of the leadership that leads us to conclude that Khrushchev is confronted by a firm group of opponents on all issues. Nor can we find any convincing evidence that any group or individual within the present leadership would radically alter Soviet strategy if Khrushchev were suddenly to depart the scene.

The November, 1962, Plenum.

Turning to the November Plenum, we can quite safely dismiss any notion that the Soviet retreat on the Cuban issue had a causal relationship with the decisions it adopted. There were numerous signs beforehand of the way in which the leadership apprehended the major problems confronting it and the possible approaches to them that the Plenum would be called upon to enact, although there was also evident a large measure of indecisiveness. And the sweeping reorganization of Party bodies ordered by the Plenum, although quite revolutionary if fully implemented, looks in many respects like a panchwash effort, the larger implications of which seem hardly to have been perceived.

Concerning the personnel changes enacted as a result of the Plenum's decisions, we should consider first of all the significance of the new Secretariat appointments. Although the full import of the current reshuffling of cadres will become clear only in the course of time, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn even now.

With the [illegible] and [illegible], the Secretariat now has more members than [illegible] the two of the new men, Rudakov, Chairman of the new [illegible] for Industry and Construction, and Titov, Chairman of the [illegible] Committee for Transportation and Communications, appear under Khrushchev in the Khrushchev camp, and appear to have risen under his aegis. Andropov, the only new Secretary whose function was not explicitly announced at the time of his appointment, has been head of the [illegible] for liaison with Bloc Parties [illegible] Andropov, too, [illegible] Khrushchev [illegible] and [illegible] his activity at the [illegible] Congress of the Ukrainian Party.

Thus, Khrushchev's position within the Secretariat seems strengthened, and the position of the Secretariat itself, we believe, is enhanced by the increase in the membership plus the vesting of high-level functional responsibilities in the four new Secretaries.

This does not necessarily mean that a Presidium versus Secretariat contest will ensue, for Khrushchev, Kozlov, and Suslov sit on both bodies, and in any case the differences in views between leaders who sit on the same Party organs are more important in a future power struggle than a schematic juxtaposition of these organs themselves would suggest.

One source of potential disorder and possible trouble can be seen in the RSFSR Bureau, however. The situation at the top is murky right now. We know that KUZNETSOV, the former Party Union First Secretary whom the Plenum elevated to Candidate-Membership in the Presidium, has become a First Deputy Chairman of the Bureau, but it is impossible to say yet whether Kuznetsov has retained his First Deputy Chairmanship of the Bureau now that he has been shifted to the lesser job of Chairman of the RSFSR Council of Ministers. There appears to be some intentional reticence on this point; the recently concluded meeting of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet afforded the regime any number of obvious opportunities to make known the present composition of the RSFSR Bureau, but these opportunities were rather obviously not used. The RSFSR Bureau, in any case, appears to have lost some of its former luster (and possibly its attraction) as a power base through the creation alongside it of four additional CC Bureaus.

POLYANSKIY, move from the Chairmanship of the RSFSR Council of Ministers to Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, with his specific duties as yet unknown, also raises questions about the future that cannot be answered at present. It may be that Polyanskiy will be in charge of agriculture, now that KOVALEV has been removed from his Council of Ministers position. If so, his position is not an enviable one. If he should not be given a specific portfolio, his position would appear weaker still, for the really salient fact about him after the November Plenum is that he is the only Full Presidium member slotted with so low-ranking a governmental job as just plain Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers (in contrast to Mikoyan and Kosygin, who are First Deputy Chairmen). He would then be just one of seven Deputy Chairmen and, if he remains without a portfolio, far from the most important of the [illegible]. Brezhnev, as Chairman of the Allbrotherly Supreme Soviet, is a really significant political figure, who would quite clearly tower over

Polyanskiy. [illegible] accession to the [illegible] leadership under a [illegible] leadership.

The other major organizational [illegible] of the Plenum, the [illegible] of the Party-State Control [illegible] all sorts of possibilities, but the gestation period is likely to be a lengthy one. The almost frenzied [illegible] to prevent the Control [illegible] of a purely Leninist conception of [illegible] that the [illegible] controversial one. [illegible] level would appear to [illegible] a member of the Secretariat. [illegible] as a result of being put in the hands of the Central Committee, for, on the face of it, one might have more logically supposed Brezhnev--already a Politburo Candidate-Member and head of the trade-union organization--to get the job.

The situation at the top, as we see it, is thus one of unusual fluidity. Sudden changes and even radical shifts, cannot be ruled out. There appears to be a good deal of thrashing about on policy matters (events on the cultural-intellectual scene have provided the most vivid evidence of this recently), and there are undoubtedly some leaders who think that Khrushchev has lost his touch. Next April he will be 69. How much longer he can keep going at his current pace is anybody's guess; ours is, rather shorter, than longer.

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